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## The Dancer and the Übermarionette: Isadora Duncan and Edward Gordon Craig

Olga Taxidou

For hours I would stand completely still, my two hands folded between my breasts, covering the solar plexus. My mother often became alarmed to see me remain for such long intervals quite motionless as if in a trance—but I was searching, and finally discovered the central spring of all movement, the crater of motor power. (Duncan, *My Life* 58)

The above quotation from Isadora Duncan's autobiography brings together some of the concepts explored in this essay: movement and stasis, the human body and the automaton, potentiality and impossibility, presence and absence—all concepts that I propose to explore through the intricate relationships between Duncan's dancer and Edward Gordon Craig's übermarionette.

Craig's and Duncan's conceptions of the performing body have sometimes been read in opposition: complete absence of physical and psychological embodiment at one extreme and absolute expressiveness at the other. Where Craig's übermarionette might be read as a mechanized puppet or an automaton, Duncan's experiments could be said to lack technique or even form. Arnold Rood's claim that "Craig expected the actor to be an Isadora Duncan *with* discipline" comes to mind (Rood xvii). However, throughout this essay I will try to problematize these binaries and the ways that they have respectively been read as undiluted anti-theatricality at one extreme, and as pure theatricality at the other. Reading them as folding into each other—in addressing similar issues, and in the ways they present themselves both as ancient and modern—may again help us to see them as doubles rather than opposites.

On March 16, 1900, at the New Gallery, Duncan made her London début orchestrated by the gallery owner Charles Hallé. The guest list reads like a roll call of leading British writers, artists and academics—all of whom were to play a crucial role in that significant transitional period from aestheticism to modernism—but Hallé's coup was to invite the classicist Jane Harrison to recite extracts from Homer and Theocritus to accompany Duncan's dance. A few nights later Duncan was taken to Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre to watch him perform in the celebrated production of *The Bells*. There she also watched a performance of *Cymbeline* with Ellen Terry, a production that included Terry's son Edward Gordon Craig. Craig and Duncan's tumultuous relationship has been well documented. I would like to analyze these two events as emblematic of both the historical contexts that helped to create these two defining figures of modernist performance and of the complex, often contradictory and conflicting ways in which they influenced each other.

In hindsight, the pairing of Harrison and Duncan, two formidable women, seems too good to be true, utterly staged and theatrical, acting as a constellation of a moment in time; a moment that brings together the visionary scholar/theorist and the equally visionary dancer/practitioner. The presence of

Andrew Lang, the pioneer of the so-called British School of Anthropology is also crucial. He was part of a group of charismatic and radical thinkers, who according to Robert Ackerman, “made possible the work of Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists” (Ackerman 29–30). This was a project that merged classicism, sociology and anthropology in a heady cocktail that proposed an evolutionary model for the study of human culture. Opposed to reading myth and religion simply through philology and narrative, the principles of ritual and rhythm became central. Indeed, it was these very principles that seem to have been embodied by Duncan’s dance and punctuated by Harrison’s text. This fusion of textuality, visuality, and movement through the figures of the two iconic women brings together the scholarly and the aesthetic in a manner that at once pays homage to the past and points towards the future.

This “past” for both scholar and dancer is, of course, Greek. In the words of a reviewer of that emblematic performance:

Ropes of roses wind about the body and the feet are shod with golden sandals. Not a single stock step is taken, and the whole dance seems like something that might have happened in ancient Greece ...

Most of the time she has spent in the British Museum, analyzing and memorizing the steps and attitudes of the classic nymphs of antique art. Her work is thus the result of the application of poetic intelligence to the art of dancing, and her aim is to study nature and the classics and abjure the conventional. (quoted in Blair 35)

Duncan’s art at this stage was, of course, fueled more by “poetic intelligence” than museum-style authenticity. However, this “Greek” aspect of her quest becomes a type of shorthand throughout her life, work, and writing. From her account of her own family drama (“Like the family of the Atrides,” she claimed), through her early training in the Delsarte system, to her later stay in and engagement with modern and ancient Greece, this Hellenic dimension of her art and her identity as a dancer, is at once historicizing but also radical (Blair 1). It helps to “free” her as a dancing woman, but also to ground her in a tradition that she sees as ancient. It fuses romance, archaeology, travel narratives, philosophy, and gender politics in a gesture that could have come straight from her choreographies, remaining elusive and contradictory, almost impossible to notate.

I am less concerned with defining the type of Hellenism that informed Duncan’s work—its philological or archaeological correctness or accuracy—and more interested in the “license” that her view of the “Greeks” gave her. This attitude towards the “Greeks” allowed her to radically rework her medium and prepare the ground for the revolution of modern dance (her aphorism “do not call me a dancer” comes to mind). And this “license” could be read as at once part of the “New Woman” movement in the performing arts of the period—where the female performer is given presence and validated, changing the discourses of representation in the process—but also part and parcel of the period’s anthropological and philosophical take on performance. Duncan’s presence in London was possibly more successful than it had been in New York as there was already a context that could accommodate her work. The staging of Greek plays at Oxford and Cambridge, E. W. Godwin’s productions influenced primarily by Schliemann’s archaeological discoveries, and the work of the Cambridge scholars themselves provided Duncan’s experiments with an aesthetic context and with a critical language that could engage with her work. More often than not, that language had recourse to models of Hellenic art and sensibility, that provided both the authenticating stamp of classicism, but also and crucially created an evolutionary trajectory that could conceptualize her work, making it simultaneously “Greek” and modern.

This “license” that Duncan took with the Greeks is in many ways characteristic and possibly pioneering of a broader modernist stance or *gestus* towards archaeology. Rather than approaching the “Greeks” as part of a nostalgic quest for unity and eternal beauty, this turn towards the past allows for formal experimentation and risk. Fueled by Schliemann’s discoveries, the work of Nietzsche, and the Cambridge Ritualists, this version of Greece sees Dionysus as a type of modern Savage God. In some ways, what Harrison was to do with her monumental *Themis* (1912) and Nietzsche had already done to classical philology with *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Duncan was proposing to do with its aesthetic modes

of representation. For her as was to be the case for many modernists, this modernist Hellenism allowed her to be radical and experimental. It also allowed her to be utopian. This was archaeology in the service of the future. More often than not, this modernist Hellenism also interacts with the aesthetics of primitivism:

If the primitivism of the early years of the century relies on the trappings of cultures far-flung in space—African masks and Tahitian maidens—it avails itself of far-off times, furnished by an archaeology moving beyond Winckelmannian classicism and Hellenism ... But Picasso's Iberian heads and Le Corbusier's polychromed Moschophorous are not reference points along a scientific established timeline, but end-runs around the inevitability of archaeological chronology: before outside history, so temporally distant as to escape the taint of historicism—and thereby ripe for exploitation by modernism. This archaeology is no longer metaphorical but utilitarian, a machine for producing objects whose alterity undergirds revolution. (Schnapp, Shanks, and Tiews 7–8)

In a recent study by Carrie J. Preston which also looks at the impact of the Delsarte system on Duncan, this turn towards Hellenism is read as “anti-modern” (Preston). On the contrary, I think, it is constitutive of modernist experimentation, and Duncan's attitude towards the Greeks is emblematic of this. Rather, I would agree with Jacques Rancière, who claims that this “archaeomodern turn ... is located at the core of the modern project” and “sets up two categories: that of figurative reason or of sleeping meaning, and the temporal category of anticipation” (Rancière 28–29). So, this attitude towards the Greeks is possibly about the past but probably has more to say about the aesthetics of utopia. And we know how often the term “future” features in the writing of both Duncan and Craig.

Duncan's visit to London was followed by her visit to Berlin, which familiarized her not only with the monumental Hellenism of the museum, but crucially exposed her to the work of Nietzsche. More recently dance theorists and even theologians have analyzed Duncan's encounter with the work of Nietzsche not simply as that of influence and inspiration, but as formative for both the dance and the philosophical tradition of modernity. For Duncan in many ways is seen as embodying Nietzsche's critique of the dualisms of Christianity, particularly those concerning the body. Interestingly Nietzsche's emphasis on the power of ritual, rhythm, and collectivity is derived from his specific reading of Greek Tragedy: a reading that prioritizes ritual over narrative, and the chorus over the protagonist. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Duncan finds not simply the theory for her practice, but a way of overriding the division between the two. Her statement that she “never once danced a solo” expresses her attempt to dance *as* a chorus, a Dionysian chorus that brings together the individual dancer and the collective. She called Nietzsche's first book “my bible” (Duncan, *Art of the Dance* 98) and in her early essays on dance wrote in terms that reverberated with echoes from that book: “To give back to the dance its place as the Chorus, that is the ideal. When I have danced I have tried always to be the Chorus ... I have never once danced a solo” (Duncan, *Art of the Dance* 96). Of course, she *did* dance solo and, possibly more than any other modern dancer, her dances were charged with what Jane Goodall describes as a *mesmeric* quality—the quality Craig found problematic in live performers (Goodall 84–121). However, the fact that she desired and attempted to dance as a chorus is crucial. Her almost impossible task gestures towards a form of embodiment that was experimented with in many a modernist school of acting—that of the performer as emblematic symbol and laboratory for the creation of collective identity. This collective identity for Duncan, both via Nietzsche and via her own studies and experiments, had a distinct Greek inflection. Again in a quasi-evolutionary trope the dance connects both with a glorious past and points towards a utopian future. That future for Duncan also has a feminine dimension, so much so that we could claim that for her the future belonged not to the superman but to the superwoman.

In this context we can further understand Harrison's attraction to Duncan. She too was fueled by her reading of Nietzsche and the impact that Nietzsche had on the so-called “German” tradition of classical philology paralleled Duncan's impact on its aesthetic. For all her references to and admiration of Greek monuments and artifacts in London and Berlin, her performances could not be further removed from the



kind of aesthetic Hellenism that Harrison was already tiring of in the 1890s. This was Hellenism that was fluid, embodied, modern, and feminine. Its chief exponent for Duncan was not the philosopher, the archaeologist or the classicist, but the dancer. Indeed, Duncan found in her reading of the “Greeks” a vitalist organicism, that could give form to all those categories and previous modes of engagement with the past. For her that form was the female dancer, primarily embodied in herself.

This prioritizing of the *dancer* could be read in conjunction with Craig’s “artist of the future,” and both as aspects of the emerging figure of the modernist director. If according to Alain Badiou the Director figure is also a philosophical figure (a thinker of mediation), then the *dancer* as such a trope opens up further possibilities for the whole issue of theatricality. Indeed, positing the dancer as the central figure, around whom all the issues of performability and theatricality hinge, makes for a very radical reading of the theatrical event, one that does not necessarily define itself against philosophy and the word, but rather attempts to embody these categories. In opposition to Craig’s all-powerful but absent director, Duncan’s dancer is ever present and vulnerable. For Duncan, Craig’s “Artist of the Theatre of the Future” is the dancer. Badiou writes about the significance of Duncan in this hypostasizing of dance:

In the wake of Russian ballets and Isadora Duncan, dance is a crucial art precisely because it is only act. The paradigm of a vanishing art, dance does not produce works in the ordinary sense of the term. But what is its trace, where does it circumscribe the thinking of its own singularity? Is there only ever a trace of its repetition, and never of its act? Art would then amount to the unrepeatable within a repetition. It would have no other destiny than that of giving form to this unrepeatable. (Badiou 159)

Interestingly, Badiou groups Duncan’s work with the Russian ballets, and much recent scholarship has been devoted to tracing the impact of Duncan’s tours of Russia, and how they influenced the aesthetics and the ethos of what was to later become the phenomenal Ballets Russes. Importantly too, this claim of dance to provide the *metalanguage* for theatrical presence within the modernist experiments, also has its roots in Duncan. Badiou’s theorizations of dance are pre-echoed in much of Duncan’s own writing. Interestingly, though, Badiou somewhat neglects the presence of the dancer’s body and the ways that presence rubs against the “paradigm of a vanishing art.” For Duncan the female dancer’s body becomes the ultimate *ekphrastic* trope on the stage that is capable of giving presence to that “vanishing art,” of bridging the word and the flesh, and the past and the future; that past for Duncan’s dancer was Greek.

This Hellenic dimension, again, takes many forms: it can be aesthetic, vitalist, archaeological, geopolitical, but it is also Greek in the ways it revises the ancient quarrel. To posit the female dancer at the centre of performance is to engage the ancient quarrel between tragedy (theatricality) and philosophy in very challenging ways. Duncan’s embodied, physicalized, and feminized version of theatrical presence blatantly goes against everything that Plato abhorred about the power of the theatrical, particularly the power of the chorus. The fact that Duncan herself claimed to always dance as a chorus only compounds her vision. Duncan’s dancer in many ways comes to enact Plato’s fear of those “poets” who were “ignorant of what is right and legitimate in the realm of the Muses,” and “raging like Bacchanals and possessed with inordinate delights, they mingled lamentations with hymns and paeans with dithyrambs” (Plato 700 a–b). This for Plato creates the ultimate anathema: the “universal confusion of forms.” And it is this “universal confusion of forms” that Duncan may be said to strive for through the *ekphrastic* use of her dancing body. It becomes a mechanism to explore this confusion, its modernist aesthetics, but also its politics and its metaphysics. For Plato this confusion of forms spills out into the audience and through its particular modes of spectatorship has dire political implications:

By composition of such kind and discourse to the same effect, they naturally inspired the multitude with a contempt of musical law, and a conceit of their own competence as judges. Thus our once silent audiences have found a voice, in the persuasion that they understand what is good and bad in art; the old sovereignty of the best, aristocracy, has given way to an evil sovereignty of the audience, a theatrocracy. (Plato 700 a–b)

In positing the notion of a female dancer as chorus, we can claim that Duncan was embracing this view of “theatrocracy” where both its agent and its medium of production was the body. The fact she herself saw her work as part of the emancipatory project of modernity is telling. For Duncan this has a politics, but significantly is also has a metaphysics, and the two are not necessarily read in opposition. Kimerer L. LaMothe writes:

When Duncan describes her dance as a “prayer” or a “revelation,” or when she describes a dancer as a “priest,” she is gesturing toward this function of dancing: its ability to exercise a creative capacity—not a capacity of our minds or even imaginations per se, but a capacity of our bodily becoming that finds expression in thinking and imagining. ... Dancing is so by enacting the inherent creativity of our bodily existence. As bodies we are always already bringing into being (kinetic images of) ourselves, world, gods, and thus, our relationships to what these images represent. Acknowledging and exercising this creative capacity, for both Duncan and Nietzsche, is a moral responsibility. (LaMothe 262)

This is the dancer not distinctly as artist or philosopher, but as a type or merging of those categories; we could say that it proposes the dancer as a type of demiurge.

Nietzsche’s phrase from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “I would believe only in a God who could dance” comes to mind (Nietzsche 153). And, indeed, it stresses the degree to which Duncan was not simply influenced by Nietzsche, but in many ways proposed a spatial, physicalized version of his philosophy. The two projects can be read as analogous. We could even possibly claim that the ways in which Nietzsche and subsequently the Cambridge Ritualists—and particularly Harrison—revised and radically reworked the German tradition in classicism find an aesthetic equivalent in Duncan’s dances.

This aesthetic for Duncan encompasses a totality, one that also brings with it a philosophical and crucially a pedagogical dimension. “To dance is to live. What I want is a *School of life*” (Duncan, *Art of the Dance* 141). In line with the modernist legacy of creating schools of training performers, Duncan’s work had a strong pedagogical dimension, although the more traditional dance theorists have accused her of not having a technique. However, equating dance with life, places demands on the pedagogy that does not see itself simply as imparting technique and concrete knowledge, but as passing on a style that becomes an attitude towards life itself. For Duncan was not simply interested in training new dancers. Hers was a more ambitious project. Deborah Jowitt writes:

Duncan’s interpretations of Nietzsche and Darwin led her to a vision of the “dance of the future” as an emblem of an improved human species. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile* filled her with ideas about education through nature. It’s no wonder that she thought her mission to found schools. Certainly she made no money from them. (Jowitt 28)

In a connecting thread that both links and re-writes Nietzsche’s *übermensch* and Craig’s *übermarionette* with Duncan’s experiments, for her that “improved human species” is the dancer, whose body can act as a lightning rod, connecting it both to the earth and to the sky, to the past and to the future. Jowitt claims that Duncan “thought of herself as a dynamo,” and draws analogies with much of the thinking about electricity at the time (Jowitt 27). This is a fascinating image, one that brings together the spiritual/metaphysical aspect of her dance with the purely mechanical and even technological. For Duncan was as much interested in the dancer’s body as a locus of primal (female) energies as she was interested in the body as a “natural machine,” governed by the rhythms and movement of nature itself. Her fascination with Nietzsche was matched with that of Darwin. This blending of evolutionary theory, with the rhythms of primal ritual, has clear parallels in the work of Harrison and the Cambridge School. And it also bears clear parallels with Craig’s mechanical but phantasmic *übermarionette*. The idea that the body itself is transformed into a type of physicalized *ekphrasis*, able to shift between artistic forms, and the spheres of the earthly and the divine could be said to find two complementary paradigms in the work of Duncan and Craig.





Figure 1. [Isadora] Duncan Dancing. Reproduced courtesy of the Edward Gordon Craig Estate.



Craig's übermarionette was never materialized, remaining a ghost in the machine, whereas Duncan was able to turn her body into the thing she strived for. However, the issue of notation and reproduction remains. In some ways Craig resolved this by never actually creating his vision and locating all its power, creative, phantasmal, or otherwise within the agent who controls his übermarionette: the director. Duncan, on the other hand, in effect turned her body into such a laboratory for the presence of the dancer. LaMothe calls this enterprise "kinetic imaging," a process through which the dancer creates her own presence (LaMothe 250):

As Duncan confirms, her goal in dancing was never to become a professional dancer. Nor was dance one activity among others she could take or leave. Dance, for Duncan, was *the* activity capable of exercising and educating the medium through which women and men live in ways that help them develop the physical consciousness needed to generate values that nourish and affirm life ... Her dancing exercises faith in the body and its great reason. (LaMothe 260)

Like her classicist counterpart Harrison, Duncan is here read not solely as inspiring a particular discipline or art form but as partaking in and helping create a specifically feminist sensibility (albeit not always aligned with the sociohistorical movements of feminism itself), that formulates its own aesthetics and philosophy. Duncan's various schools of life were not interested in creating reproductions or even in training in particular techniques. More interested in creating this *attitude* towards physicality and the art of dance in general, her methods and indeed her choreographies themselves placed demands on notation.

The notation of dance, like the formalizing of the pedagogy of acting, becomes significant within the experiments of modernism. In some ways, Duncan's experiments at once undo the previous more traditional modes of teaching and notation, and also pose new demands. In creating work that was not meant to be reproduced, that substituted the paradigm for the example, her work may have inspired many artists, visual and otherwise, but was almost impossible to notate. Her early tours of Russia (between 1904 and 1909) inspired prominent visual artists like Léon Bakst, and indeed more recent scholarship sees her work as a precursor to that of the Ballet Russes, which would have delighted Craig, as he claimed that the Russian company had merely plagiarized "The American," as he referred to her in *The Mask*.

It might not be coincidental that while Duncan's dances proved very difficult to notate, they nevertheless acted as a source of inspiration for literary and visual modernism. Craig himself could not resist drawing Duncan; perhaps the most famous drawings of her are those by fellow American Abraham Walkowitz, who drew over five thousand versions of Duncan, in an attempt to visually capture her dance.

The fascination that Duncan inspired in her fellow modernists, particularly in the plastic and visual arts, was immense. In many ways, this fascination could also be read as an attempt to capture and notate her experiments. Drawing as it did on a variety of sources, and filtering them through the female body, Duncan's dance placed demands on systems of notation—demands that could perhaps only be addressed by recourse to other artistic media. The crucial impact that she had on these other modernist arts, textual and visual, need not necessarily be read as a shortcoming or a failure of her art form—its inability to have its own metalanguage—but can be seen as part of its radical potential. Its ability to transform, morph into other forms again underlines its *ekphrastic* dimension, at once located but permeable and utopian. The dance critic Walter Terry writes about this quality of her dance:

Although her dance inarguably sprang from her inner sources and resources of motor power and emotional desire, the overt aspects of her dance were clearly colored by Greek art and the sculptor's concept of the body in arrested gesture promising further action. These influences may be seen clearly in photographs of her and in the art works she inspired. (Terry 155)

Interestingly, Terry's phrase "arrested gesture promising further action" and his fusion of "motor power and emotional desire" points towards this utopian quality of Duncan's dance, but also somewhat incongruously can be read as drawing parallels with the phantasmatic qualities of Craig's übermarionette. Again the mechanical and the vitalist seem to morph into each other. And recording, being inspired by, attempting to notate Duncan's dances almost invariably creates that "confusion of forms" that Plato so abhorred in the power of theatre. The image and imagistic trope that transpires throughout most of these attempts is probably most clearly exemplified in Walkowitz's many sketches of Duncan, and that is the trope of the hieroglyph. Used throughout Modernist experiment (e.g., Ezra Pound, H.D., Vsevolod Meyerhold) as the mode that attempts to graphically notate a particularly kind of kinetic and poetic sensibility, the hieroglyph becomes a type of *gestus* of writing that brings together movement and stasis, writing and image, the present and the future. Of course the hieroglyph, as exemplified in the work of H.D., also inflects the model of Hellenism, making it no longer pure and classical, but hybrid and Alexandrian. Perhaps Duncan's experiments in dance could also be helpful in approaching Pound's translations of classical Greek plays for performance.

In some ways the image of the dancer as hieroglyph could not be further removed from the image of actor as übermarionette. Although Isadora Duncan's impact on modern and contemporary dance is undoubtable, the impact of Craig might initially appear to be incongruous. However, if we approach their work as intricately linked both in their attempts to address the issue of the presence of the performer and in their multiple excursions in creating a pedagogy and a terminology for such a presence, then we may begin to approach the issue of their impact not only on their contemporaries but primarily on the performers of the future. This concept of the future can be read in its immediate historical trajectory (Duncan's and Craig's seminal influence on contemporary performance), but crucially it also engages the utopian dimension of their work, in a sense addressing *all* the futures to come. It is in this context that the specifically Hellenic dimension of their work also features, as a trope that at once creates the aura of lineage and authenticity, but also points towards an always unrealizable, phantasmatic future to come.

The issue of the mechanical is central to understanding both projects. This may be obvious in regard to Craig's übermarionette. It is, however, of no less significance in discussions about Duncan. While the mechanical might be associated with the quintessentially modern, and the ethereal with the Hellenic and ancient, both these artists conflate and experiment with these categories in challenging ways. The concept of the body itself as an automaton is prominent in the work of both. The idea of the automaton, dominant in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century thinking, transpires as a *topos*, where mimesis itself is experimented with and challenged (Reilly 201). The binaries of internal/external, free will/control, material/metaphysical, anthropomorphism/abstraction are all experimented with during this period. Craig's übermarionette could also be seen within the context of the turn-of-the-century fascination with automata and the challenges they pose to notions of originality, interiority, artistic agency, and artistic expression. Interestingly, many early modernist automata presented themselves as copies of ancient, mostly Greek statues. Equally fascinating is the fact that Duncan's poses, influenced by her training in the Delsarte system, can be read as attempts to copy Greek statues.

The dance historian Arnold Rood claims that "Craig expected the actor to be an Isadora Duncan *with* discipline," repeating an assumption that has plagued Duncan's reception by the more traditional dance theorists. However, if we look at the ways that Duncan herself spoke about her technique, it is clear that the language she uses is saturated with images of motors and machines. "Emotion works like a motor. It must be warmed up to run well," she writes (Duncan, *Art of the Dance* 99). Preston writes convincingly about Duncan's use of the image of the motor to describe the relationship between independent artistic will and its expression:

The motor's ability to move several objects simultaneously offers an image of a "multiplied body," an interest that was shared by F. T. Marinetti (who was also cheering 'Hurrah' for motors) and influenced Futurist Dance. The power of motorized propulsion to channel forces and move a foreign object offered the ideal of dance movements that appear to be executed effortlessly in a self-abandonment that Duncan associated with classical rituals. Finally, the motor's endless repetition inspired Duncan's desire to simulate spontaneity in her dances. (Preston 146)

Preston helpfully calls this Duncan's "deliberate choreography of spontaneity," and locates it within a "tension in antimodern performances" where "a soloist attempts to assert agency and freedom but through a preformulated mythic construct that inevitably confines" (Preston 146). However, it might be equally interesting not to read this tension as a constraint on individual artistic expression, and rather, as Preston's own analysis implies, to see it as enacting a dialectic between humanism and abstraction, between indeed "pure" expression and form. And again the move towards abstraction is seen as a classicizing impulse. Rather than being anti-modern, this impulse and the tensions and contradictions it entails, might be at the heart of the modern. It also might be part of the ways the modern and contemporary gestures, or poses, to use Preston's evocative term, towards the future.

The tension between the animate and the inanimate, between the "soul" and the "motor" also haunts Craig's writing, and especially when it comes to his manifestos about acting. Although we associate him with the banishing of live actors from the stage, in *The Theatre Advancing* (1919) he writes: "I ask for the liberation of the actor that he may develop *his* own powers and cease from being the Marionette of the playwright" (Craig, *Theatre Advancing* 228). In this sense the übermarionette rather than replacing the actor becomes an Über-actor. This type of actor would be free from emotion, from personality, from psychology, and primarily free from the dominating power of the playwright. This critique of the dominating power of the playwright has traditionally been read as heralding the era of the all-powerful director; in a sense the actor substitutes one form of agency for another. However, to do justice to Craig himself and to further forge the incongruous links with Duncan's project it might be useful to complicate this binary further, by locating Craig's writing within the manifesto fervor of the avant-garde (its modernist pose) while simultaneously reading it as part of modernism's classical turn.

Craig's famous aphoristic call for the banishing of the actor from the stage can be read as part of Modernist theatre's resuscitation of the anti-theatricality debate: a debate that uses the discourses of theatre at once to attack it and to herald in the theatre of the future. Craig's essay, hugely influential since it first appeared, can be seen to partake in the manifesto writing of the period: apocalyptic and eschatological, it relies on an aesthetics of catastrophe, what recent critics have termed a *via negativa* (McGuinness 149). Through the ashes of the old theatre, the new would be reborn, phoenix-like. So, it does not seem inappropriate for him to stage his essay with a highly evocative image that quotes the great Italian actress, Eleanora Duse: "To save the Theatre, the Theatre must be destroyed, the actors and actresses must all die of the plague ... They make art impossible" (quoted in Craig, *The Mask* 2). This gesture of catastrophe, further on in the quotation is followed by Duse's equally demanding call for "a return to the Greeks," again following the double turn towards the past and the future. And this return is echoed throughout Craig's essay in a number of ways: in the ways that like Plato, it too utilizes the discourses of drama to attack it. Craig, like Plato, uses highly theatrical tropes, the dramatic dialogue, the creation of personae, and the structure of death/resurrection. Martin Puchner has recently written about the Platonic aspect of much modernist experimentation in the theatre. Craig's writing too can be read as radically reworking both the discourses of the philosophical dialogue and of theatricality as a way of staging the oldest debate in the history of aesthetics—the ancient quarrel—the quarrel about mimesis itself, its philosophical, aesthetic, and political efficacy (Puchner 88). And as in Plato this debate is located on the body of the actor:

Acting is not an art. It is therefore incorrect to speak of the actor as an artist. For accident is an enemy of the artistic. Art is the exact antithesis of Pandimonium [sic], and Pandimonium is created by the tumbling together of many accidents; Art arrives only by design. Therefore in order to make any work of art it is clear we may work in those materials with which we can calculate. Man is not one of these materials. (Craig, *The Mask* 3)

The shift from acting to art in general and the denouncing of “Man” as inappropriate material for art is characteristic. It can be read as echoing Plato’s concerns about the “confusion of forms,” a confusion that results in aesthetic but also political chaos (theatrocracy). It is not surprising in this context to find that Craig’s seminal essay is itself punctuated by two equally important quotations from “the Greeks” that he so often summons throughout it. One is from Plato’s *Republic*; it is the famous section in Book III about the rhapsode:

And therefore when any one of these pantomimic gentlemen, who are so clever that they can imitate anything comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our state such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so, when we have anointed him with myrrh and sewn a garland of wool upon his head, we shall lead him away to another city. (quoted in *The Mask* 5)

How fitting that Craig uses this iconic passage—one that has generated so much philosophical reflection about mimesis—to frame and to also justify his own theories about the übermarionette. Like Plato he is concerned about the power of the actor to distort reality and to *mesmerize*, to act as a kind of charismatic demagogue who threatens the political order itself (“the law will not allow them”). And as in Plato this power of the theatre and theatricality is seen to be at the core of the problem of mimesis itself. To do full justice to the debate itself Craig also calls upon Aristotle in support of his manifesto for the actor, or more generally we could claim for a modern theatre. The quotation he uses from Aristotle is the equally famous passage from *Poetics* (VI, 19 and XXVI, 1–4), where the “spectacle” is denounced as the work of “the stage machinist” rather than the poet, and where tragedy “is felt even apart from representation and actors” (quoted in *The Mask* 11). This quotation appears at the end of the essay, while the one from Plato is in an earlier note. These are the only two notes Craig refers to in his essay. With Duse’s epigram at the start they serve to frame his manifesto, to give it a historical lineage and to theatricalize it. So, when Craig calls upon the “Greeks” to help him construct and articulate his argument, he is not simply being nostalgic, calling upon a unifying and homogenizing rhetoric that would give his argument the aura of the classical. In many ways he is calling upon the “Greeks” as both a philologist and as a theorist of theatre. Indeed, his own essay may be said to rehearse the ancient quarrel itself. And as in Plato and Aristotle this quarrel is given shape and form through the workings of theatre and in particular is located on the performing body.

If we consider the role of puppets and automata (*thaumata*, Plato calls them, meaning miraculous creatures) in Plato’s philosophical writings, we can perhaps even claim a lineage for Craig’s übermarionette that places it within a genealogy of writing about the efficacy (both aesthetic and political) of mimesis enacted through the figure of the automaton. If in turn we read this übermarionette in conjunction with Duncan’s dancer, not in opposition, but as its double—as indeed both Plato and Antonin Artaud understand the double in theatre—then they can be seen to be locked in an embrace, and possibly dancing in the same chorus.



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